Arsacid Cities in the Hanshu and Houhanshu

Author(s): Hamidreza Pasha Zanous and Juping Yang

Source: *Iran & the Caucasus*, 2018, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2018), pp. 123-138

Published by: Brill

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26548930

REFERENCES
Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:
https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26548930?seq=1&cid=pdf-
reference#references_tab_contents
You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

Arsacid Cities in the *Hanshu* and *Houhanshu*[*]

Hamidreza Pasha Zanous; Juping Yang
Nankai University, Tianjin

Abstract

In the reports of Chinese travellers submitted to the Emperors, they mentioned the places they had visited or heard of. Although some scholars have tried to identify these Chinese names as specific places in the Iranian Plateau and its bordering plains, their locations are still somewhat vague and debatable. This article discusses the place-names mentioned in Chinese sources and attempts to verify that they could have denoted the localities along the ancient Great Khorasan Road and other routes, which were once the main sections of the Silk Road. Among them, the route that Chinese traveller Gan Ying might have passed before he reached the western frontier of the Arsacid Empire will also be discussed in this study.

Keywords

Arsacid Cities, Han Empire, *Hanshu* and *Houhanshu*, Khorasan Road, Silk Road, Iranian Toponymy, Sino-Iranica

INTRODUCTION

The Arsacid dynasty, also known as the Parthian Dynasty (c. 250 B.C. to 226 A.D.) was largely contemporary with the Han Dynasty (c. 206 B.C. to 220 A.D.). During the reigns of the Arsacid kings, the Iranian and Chinese peoples were in contact in a variety of ways. Reciprocal influence among the Chinese, Iranian, and Roman civilisations can be seen more clearly through researching the trade along the Silk Road. Before the rise of the Arsacids, there were two main trade routes in the Iranian plateau and its

bordering plains; one was the ancient Great Khorasan Road, and the other, the Achaemenid Royal road. These two routes paved the way for cultural and economic exchanges among the ancient civilisations of the West and East. These routes in West Asia, as well as the Han Empire's network of roads, eventually became major sections of the Silk Road.

The ancient Chinese records from the Han period, especially *Shiji* (史記), *Hanshu* (漢書), and *Houhanshu* (後漢書), contain information about the cities and routes in the Arsacid kingdom and its neighbouring lands. Many scholars have discussed the place-names mentioned in the Chinese accounts, and several different theories about the locations of them in the Arsacid kingdom have been put forward and debated. In our opinion, in order to identify the place-names in the Chinese accounts, the location of the main trade routes should be clarified first. According to the information on the Arsacid routes and cities provided by Isidorus of Charax, it seems that the ancient Great Khorasan Road was the major conduit for East-West trade during the Arsacid period. Thus, it may be possible to identify the place-names in *Hanshu* and *Houhanshu* with certain cities along this road.

ARSACID PLACE-NAMES IN THE *HANSHU* AND *HOUHASHU*

Originally, the Arsacids were tightly tied to their steppe heritage, but they gradually accepted some traditional cultures of the sedentary peoples they subjugated. For example, they began to establish new cities and strongholds (Olbrycht 2015: 117) in their domain. According to Ammianus Marcellinus (23.6.4), Arsaces "filled Persia with cities, with fortified camps, and with strongholds" (*civitatum et castrorum castellorumque munimentis oppleta Perside*). The Chinese traveller Zhang Qian also mentions that "Cities and towns in *Anxi* (安息，generally identified with Parthia) are similar with Dayuan and all large and small cities amount to several hundred" (Sima Qian 1959: 3162; Yang 2013: 83).[1]

---

[1] In addition, the successive appearance of new capitals is an evidence of the expansion of the Arsacid kingdom. Mithradatkart-Nisa (near modern Ashkhabad) was the "home base" (Shahbazi 1990: 768-770) where the treasury and archives were kept, but Asaak (near modern Qūčān) was the coronation city (Chaumont 1973: 217-22). Dārā was a stronghold on Mount Apaortenon, built by Tiridates I (Shahbazi, ibid.: 768-770). Arsacid kings also established royal residences at Seleucia, Ecbatana, and Ctesiphon (Garthwaite

As mentioned, Chinese records, especially *Hanshu* and *Houhanshu*, provide information about the names of certain cities in the Arsacid kingdom and along the Silk Road. In the following pages, we will try to interpret the Arsacid place-names appearing in these sources.

1. *Anxi* or *An-hsi* (安息, Middle Chinese *an-sik*): namely, the Arsacid Empire, as known to the Chinese. It is a transcription of *Aršak*, the name of the founder of the Arsacid Dynasty. The Chinese *-n* usually renders the foreign *-r* in transcriptions of the Han period (Pulleyblank 1989: 999). It was the name the Chinese used to call the country ruled by the Arsacid dynasty, even after its fall.

2. *Fandou* (< **phuan-təw*, 番兜): Many scholars assume that Fandou refers to Parθava (Hirth 1885: 139; Laufer 1919: 187; Hulsewé/Loewe 1979: 115). Parθava was one of the key provinces under the Achaemenids and the birthplace of Arshak's family. Nisa or the "city of Parthaunisa", which was in the northeast of Parθava, was most likely one of the capitals of the Arsacid Empire. It seems that by mistake, the Han people took the name of the province for the name of the capital (Hill 2015: 245). Thus, the city was known to Chinese envoys as Fandou (Yang 2014). There is an interesting challenge here. In *Hanshu* we read that "the distance between the Arsacid capital (Fandou) and Han capital at Chang'an is 11,600 li (c. 5000 km)" (Ban Gu 1959: 3889-3890). Later, the author of *Houhanshu* says that "the kingdom of Anxi is situated at Hedu city, which is 25,000 li from Luoyang" (Fan Ye 1971: 2918-19). Since the distance between Chang'an and Luoyang at that time was only 850 li and Fandou (Nisa) was only 3400 li from Hedu (which may be identified with Hekatompylos; see below), there must have been a mistake about the distance between Fandou and Chang'an in *Hanshu*. Recently, a Chinese scholar stated that the "11,600 li" in *Hanshu* could have been an error for "16,500 li."(Yu 2013: 54). If we take "16,500 li" as the distance between Fandou and Chang'an, this means that *Hanshu*'s information on the distance between Fandou and Chang'an is still vague

2005: 77). It seems that Hecatompylos functioned not only as one of several capitals, but also as the formal capital during the Empire's early period (Chaumont, ibid.: 217-22). Ray (Gk. Rhagai Arsacia) also served as a capital for a brief period (Shahbazi, ibid.). Some scholars believe that Ctesiphon, as a city for the royal coronation ceremony and a representational city of the Arsacids, may not have become the official capital until the reign of Gotarzes I (r. c. 90–80 B.C.) (Garthwaite , ibid.).

because, according to the *Houhanshu,* the town of Mulu 木鹿 (Merv), which is near to Nisa, is 20,000 li distant from Luoyang. If true, then the distance between Fandou (Nisa) and Chang'an must have been also over 20,000 li. This is clear if we look at the geographical locations of Parθava, Nisa, Merv, Chang'an and Luoyang, and measure the distances among them. It should be mentioned here that Nisa, the stronghold of the Arsacids, was in the northeast of Parθava, and Merv was to the east of Nisa. In fact, Nisa and Merv were close to each other.

3. *Hedu* (<*$\gamma wa\text{-}d\partial wk$*, 和檀): Hedu is the name for the Arsacid capital in the *Houhanshu*. Most scholars agree that Hedu probably refers to Hecatompylos (Hirth 1885: 141-143; Hill 2015: 245). In the *Houhanshu*, the account of the Arsacids reads: "The capital of the kingdom is the city of Hedu, which is in a distance of 25,000 li from Luoyang... Mulu city is located in its eastern border, which is also called the Lesser Anxi. The distance from Mulu to Luoyang is 20,000 li" (Fan Ye 1971: 2918-19). Since Mulu is in a distance of 20,000 li from Luoyang, this means that Parθava or Nisa is the same distance from Luoyang because they are near each other. The city of Merv (Mulu) is described as the eastern border of the Arsacid Empire and the distance between the site of Hecatompylos, which is 25,000 li from Luoyang and Merv agree very closely with measurements provided by *Houhanshu* (5000 li). Therefore, the geographical location of Hedu could be Hecatompylos, which is known to be one of the Arsacid capitals. Appian (11-57) reports that Hecatompylos was founded by Seleucus I (312-281 B.C.). It is probably identical with the ruins of Shahr-i Qumēs, some 32 km to the west of Dāmγān in the Semnan province of Iran.[2]

4. *Mulu* (*Mu-lu,* 木鹿): Mulu also refers to the oasis state of Merv or Margiana. There are many transliterations for the name of this city in Chinese (Yang 2014). "Mulu" (木鹿) was the earliest one. It was one of the pivotal cities of the Silk Road in the Arsacid period and continued to be an important city in the periods of Sasanian and Islamic Persia. One Chinese visitor who arrived in this city in the middle of the 8th century A.D.

---

[2] Excavations have been carried out here since 1967 under the direction of D. Stronach and J. Hansmann. They have been mainly interested in the Arsacid remains, but evidence of a Hellenistic settlement has also come to light (Schippmann 1986: 298-299).

was astonished by the grandeur of Molu (末祿國, another name for Merv in Chinese) (ibid).[3]

5. *Wuyishanli* (*Wu-i-shan-li*, 烏弋山離): Some scholars believe that Wuyishanli (shortened to Wuyi) is a transliteration of Alexandria, one of the many Alexandrias established by Alexander, and the chief city of the province of Arachosia (Daffinà 1982: 319; Pelliot 1959: 29). While some western sinologists tend to identify Wuyishanli with Herat or Kandahar (Hulsewé/Loewe 1979: 112, n. 250), many Chinese scholars believe that it refers to Prophthasia (Farah) (e.g., Wang 2007: 93-94). *Hanshu* shows that the kingdom of Wuyishanli was independent of the Arsacids and had its own kings and currency. The descriptions of the climate, products and customs in the Wuyishanli Kingdom were very similar to those of the Indo-Parthian Kingdom[4] in Drangiana and Arachosia. For instance, the description of lions and rhinoceros in the *Hanshu* is accurate. Lions were found in southeastern Iran until recent times. Rhinoceros, though now extinct in the region, were still being hunted in the Afridi hills northeast of Kandahar in the 16th century (Hill 2004: 523-524). However, the description of coins in Wuyishanli, "on the obverse is a human head and on the reverse is a rider on horseback" is not similar to that of the Indo-Parthian Kingdom. Undoubtedly, these kinds of coins are related to the Greek-style coinage of the Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian kings because they both carry figures of a man on horseback (Yang 2014-2015: 129). However, on the Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian coins, the man on horseback appears on the obverse, while on the reverse there are generally Greek gods standing frontally or in profile; this obviously differs from the coins of the kingdom of Wuyishanli (Ibid: 9).

---

[3] Merv played a significant role in the history of Iran. In fact, in the eyes of the Persians, what was beyond Merv was no longer Iran, but "non-Iran" (Frye 1963: 243). As mentioned above, Mulu is also called Lesser Anxi, which may reflect its importance and semi-independent status at that time (Wang 2007: 97).

[4] Indo-Parthians ruled over a large part of northwestern India from Sistan (portions of the present-day border provinces of that name in Iran and of Afghanistan) to Sindh on the Indus River, at the beginning of the 1st century A.D. They came after the Indo-Greeks and the Indo-Scythians and were, in turn, defeated by the Kushans in the second half of the 1st. century A.D. (Fröhlich 2004:100-101).

Plate I. Coins of Gondophares. Copper alloy coin. Obverse: Gondophares riding horse to right; reverse: Zeus standing left holding Nike in his hand. Two *tamgha*, one in the right field, the other, in the left (British Museum)

During the time of the informant for the *Hanshu*, Indo-Parthian coins were circulating in Drangiana and Arachosia (Fröhlich 2004: 101-102). Given that the collection of *Hanshu* was largely completed by Ban Gu in the second half of the first century A.D., it is possible that Ban Gu had mixed up the coins of Indo-Parthian with those of the so-called "Nameless King", Soter Megas of the Kushan Empire, for his coins are similar to the ones that Ban Gu described, having the portrait of the king on one side and a horseman on the other (Yang 2014-2015: 129). Moreover, we know that Pacores, the last Indo-Parthian king in Sistan, was contemporary with Soter Megas and, perhaps, imitated his coins, probably in the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. (Fröhlich 2004: 101-102).

The description of the southern route of the Silk Road in *Hanshu* reminds us that the identification of Wuyishanli is very important for understanding of geo-politics of the region. This part of *Hanshu* clearly implies that Wuyishanli was the last, but not the least, spot on the southern route of the Silk Road for Chinese envoys travelling to the Arsacid Empire (Wang 2007: 93). At the end of the first century A.D., when *Hanshu* was written by Ban Gu, the Indo-Parthian kingdom was the dominant power in Drangiana and Arachosia. Therefore, the kingdom of Wuyishanli could be identified with the Indo-Parthian kingdom, which was a southeastern neighbour of the Arsacids.

6. *Aman* (*A-man*, 阿蠻), *Sibin* (*Sšu-pin*, 斯賓), and *Yuluo* (*Yü-lo*, 于羅):
There are different theories about the locations of these place-names. In
Houhanshu we read: "From Anxi, if you travel 3,400 li west, you reach the
Kingdom of Aman. Leaving Aman and travelling 3,600 li, you reach the
Kingdom of Sibin. Leaving Sibin and travelling south you cross a river (or
by a river), then going southwest, you reach the Kingdom of Yuluo after
960 li" (Fan Ye 1971, j. 88: 2918; Kauz/Liu Yingsheng 2008: 62).

Friedrich Hirth (1885: 39, 154; see also Kauz/Liu Yingsheng 2008: 64)
identifies Anxi, here, with Hecatompylos, Aman with Ecbatana (modern
Hamadan), Sibin whith Ctesiphon (32 km southeast of modern Baghdad,
in east-central Iraq), and Yuluo with Hira.[5] He presumed that Aman is the
city of Ecbatana for its similarity in writing and because it was "the first
centre of population on the road west of Hekatompylos".[6] Ralph Kauz and
Liu Yingsheng (2008) believe that a number of reasons support an equa-
tion of Aman with Armenia. They reason that since a foreign ending [*-r*]
was rather transcribed with a [*-n*] during the Han period (for example,
Anxi for Arsace), the Chinese character 阿蠻 should be pronounced as
Anman, which corresponds with Armenia (ibid.: 63). Kauz and Yingsheng
further mentioned that the identification of Aman with Ecbatana was
doubted by Leslie and Gardiner (Leslie/Gardiner 1996: 166). Hirth also
suggests equating Yuluo with Hira (Hirth 1885: 39; Yu 2013: 28).[7] It is not
clear when exactly Hira was founded, but it seems that Ardawān IV, the
last Arsacid Great King, founded Hira as a concentration point for his
Arab allies against the Sasanian Ardašir I (Yāqut 1955-57: 328-29). Since
Hira was founded in the last years of Ardawān's reign and became a stra-
tegic and flourishing city during Sasanian times, it stands to reason that

---

[5] Hira or Al-Ḥīrah (from Syriac *ḥirtā* "camp") was an ancient city located south of al-
Kūfah in south-central Iraq (Wang 2007: 98; Hirth 1885: 39).

[6] Hirth took Greek stadia (one Greek stadion was about 185 m) for measurements in
this section of the text. This would make the distance from Anxi to Aman, 630 km; from
Aman to Sibin, 690 km; and 178 km from Sibin to Yuluo (Hirth 1885: 142; 212; 224). Cha-
vannes, Shiratori, and Yu Taishan also agree with Hirth's identification of Aman with Ec-
batana and Sibin with Ctesiphon (see Yu 2013: 26; Kauz/ Liu Yingsheng 2008: 62).

[7] Shiratori suggested that Yuluo should be identified with Ura (apud: Yu 2013: 28).

Yuluo cannot be identified with Hira. It might have been somewhere else in the western borders of the Arsacid Empire.[8]

John Hill (2015: 254-266) recently took new measurements and gave us a completely different analysis of the text: according to him, Aman may refer to Herat, Sibin to Susa, and Yuluo to Charax Spasinou.[9] The analysis offered by Hill is not commonly accepted; the distances given in *Houhanshu* (one li in the later Han period equals about 415 m) corresponded roughly with the actual geographical distances (Kauz/Liu Yingsheng 2008: 63-64). Another challenge to Hill's theory is based on the historical documents and the position of Arsacid cities in the Empire. We argue that when localising place-names in the Chinese sources, one must pay attention to the geographical position of trade routes in the Arsacid period. This allows us to better understand how the Chinese travellers and envoys passed through the Iranian Plateau, while they were visiting major Arsacid cities.

CITIES ALONG THE MAJOR TRADE ROUTES OF ARSACID EMPIRE

Chinese accounts provide the earliest explanations of main trade routes between Iran and China, later called "the Silk Road". The *Hanshu* contains the following description of the Silk Road from western China: *There are two routes starting from the Jade Gate and Sunny Barriers and leading to the Western Regions. The first one goes by Shanshan, north of the southern mountains, following the river westwards until it reaches Shache...* (Ban Gu 1959: 3872). For the southern branch of the Silk Road, *Hanshou* says: *Leaving the Jade Gate and the Sunny Barriers, one proceeds by the southern route, passes through Shanshan, travels to the south, then arrives at Wuyishanli. This is the end of the southern route, from where one turns north and then eastwards to reach Arsacid Land* (ibid.: 3889).

These routes passed through the important cities of the Han and Kushan Empires until they reached the territory of the Arsacid Empire.

---

[8] Yu Taishan identifies Yuluo with Hatra (Yu 2013: 27-28). All of these theories show that most scholars have sought the location of Yuluo near the western borders of the Arsacid Empire and on the intersection of an east-west trade route along the Euphrates.

[9] Hill (2015: 254) argues that Gan Ying took not the northern route through Central Asia, but a southern one through India. Coming from the Indus valley, he entered the territory of the Arsacids to the west of Uččh.

But where was the main section of the Silk Road in the Arsacid Empire? Although Chinese historians describe the major routes of the Silk Road in the Western regions, they do not give us detailed information on the trade routes in Arsacid land. However, as discussed before, they do give us several place-names in West Asia, which can help us to depict the main routes of trade in the Arsacid Empire. Before the Arsacid era, many major cities had been built along the ancient Great Khorasan Road and the royal road of the Achaemenids. Since early times, Iranians mostly took the Great Khorasan Road as their primary passage for both internal and external trade. The geo-political conditions of the Iranian Plateau caused this road to become the main artery that could link western and eastern parts of Iran. If we look at the geographical position of this road, we can see that some old capitals of Iran and archaeological sites were located along it. Among them are Hecatompylos, Ecbatana, and Ray.[10]

The other main route in Western Asia was the Achaemenid Royal Road. It stretched over a distance of 2,400 km from Sardis, the capital of Lydia (western Anatolia), in Asia Minor, through Mesopotamia and down the Tigris River to Susa (Hallock 1969: 6). It connected Persepolis (the summer capital of the Achaemenids) to Susa (their winter capital). During the Achaemenid period, Persia was also linked with the Indus valley by a road through Makrān (Khan 1972: 121). The Khorasan Road also continued to be an important trade route in the Achaemenid era (Cook 1983: 107).

If we compare the information from the Chinese sources with *Parthian Stations,*[11] another important source for this period, it can be seen that the Great Khorasan Road was also a main trade route in the Arsacid Empire. This book is a description and measurement of the

---

[10] The trade road that ran from Khorasan and Balkh to Mesopotamia was called the "Great Khorasan Road" by early Islamic geographers and historians during Medieaval times (Le Strange 1905: 12, 85). It stretched around the desert fringe of the Iranian Plateau (Majidzadeh 1982: 59) and led from the plains of Mesopotamia along the Diyala headwaters to the Zagros mountain range and the Iranian Plateau. It was the main trade route from Mesopotamia to the Iranian Plateau even during the Median and Assyrian periods. We know that the Assyrians always returned home from Media along the Great Khorasan Road through the Zagros Mountains (Dandamayev/Medvedskaya 2006).

[11] *Parthian Stations* was written by the Greek geographer Isidorus of Charax (c.77 A.D.)

overland routes crossing the Arsacid Empire in an easterly direction from Zeugma on the Euphrates to Alexandria in Arachosia. It is the so-called "Parthian Royal Road", which held significance both for strategic reasons and as a trade route (Schmitt 2007: 125-126). According to Isidorus, this great route starts in Antiochia on the Orontes and then leads to the Arsacid frontier at Zeugma. It runs from there along the Euphrates via Nikēphórion, Dura, and the "Royal Canal" to Seleucia (Ctesiphon) on the Tigris, then on to Ecbatana, Rhágai (Ray), Nísaia (Nisa), and Margiana, before turning southwards to Aria, Sistan, and finally Arachosia, "as far as the rule of the Arsacids extended" (Schoff 1914: 5-9; Schmitt 2007: 125-126).

Isidorus's information indicates that the Parthian Royal Road is nearly the same as the Khorasan Road. Although the rise of the Achaemenids diverted much trade to the Achaemenid Royal Road, leading to Susa and thence to Lake Helmand, it seems that under the Arsacids it was evidently a state policy to encourage the passage of goods over the old northern route, the Khorasan Road (Schoff 1914: 19). It is especially notable that Susa was not mentioned in the work of Isidorus. Within the Arsacid territory, several major cities, such as Merv, Nisa, Hecatompylos, Ray, Ecbatana, modern Kermānšāh, and Ctesiphon were linked by the Khorasan Road (Schoff 1914: 5-9).

Since the Khorasan Road was the main trade route in the Arsacid period, one may infer that information on the places within the Arsacid Empire listed in the Chinese sources was most likely provided by Chinese travellers and envoys who travelled on the same road to pass through the Iranian Plateau. This also implies that the place-names in the Chinese sources can be identified with certain cities along the Khorasan Road. Therefore, Hirth's argument that Anxi should be identified with Hecatompylos, Aman with Ecbatana, and Sibin with Ctesiphon, is more likely (Hirth 1885: 39), as all of these cities were located along the Parthian Royal Road or the Khorasan Road.[12]

---

[12] Another factor that could help to learn more about the locations of the kingdoms of Aman, Sibin, and Yuluo, is the decentralisation of the Arsacid Empire, which is manifested in the so-called seven great Persian aristocratic families of the Parthian period (Pourshariati 2008: 48-49). Some of these houses came to be associated with certain provinces in the empire: The Kārin family was in the Nihavand area (in Media), the Sūrens were in Sistan, and the Ispahbudhān were in Dihistan, in Gurgan (ibid: 49). The semi-independency of

However, as we discussed above, Hirth's identification of Yuluo with Hira cannot be accepted because Hira was established in the later years of the Arsacid Empire. It is possible to identify the location of Yuluo with Spasinou Charax on the coast of the Persian Gulf. We know that in 97 A.D., in order to establish relations with Daqin (the Roman Empire) directly, Gan Ying was dispatched there by Ban Chao. Gan Ying tried to reach Daqin when he was in Yuluo.[13] It seems that Gan Ying first travelled on the Khorasan Road until he reached Ctesiphon, and then he chose another way, which was headed to Yuluo or Charax. Although Charax was not a place along the Khorasan Road, it was a vital city for the Arsacids. It was situated at the mouth of the two largest navigable rivers in the region, the Tigris and the Euphrates, through which oriental goods were brought to Ctesiphon and the Arsacid Empire (Gregoratti 2011: 214). Here Houhanshu says: *In the ninth year of the Yongyuan reign [97 A.D.] of Emperor He, the Protector-General Ban Chao dispatched Gan Ying to travel to Daqin. He reached Tiaozhi next to a large sea. He wanted to cross it, but the sailors of the western border of Anxi said to him: "The Ocean is huge. People who make the round trip can do it in three months if the winds are favourable. However, if you encounter winds that delay you, it can take two years. That is why all the sailors prepare food enough for three years. The ocean travel often makes men homesick badly, and a number of them die on the sea." When Gan Ying heard this, he stopped his journey* (Fan Ye 1971: 2918).

The text shows that Gan Ying tried to reach Daqin via a large sea, which was near to Tiaozhi (條支), but he was stopped by Arsacid sailors. There are different opinions as to where Tiaozhi was and whether it was a kingdom or merely a city (Yang 2014-2015: 135). If it was a kingdom, it could denote the Syrian Seleucid kingdom with Antioch on the Orontes as

---

some parts of the Arsacid Empire reflected in *Hanshu* and *Houhanshu* could be a reference to the decentralisation of the Arsacid Empire. Since Wuyishanli (烏弋山離), which was independent of the Arsacids, with its own kings and currency (Wang 2007: 94-95), was described as a "kingdom or country(國)", the kingdoms or countries of Aman, Sibin, and Yuluo, as described in *Houhanshu*, could also have been semi-independent of the Arsacids. For instance, the kingdom of Aman could be a reference to the family seat of the Kārins at Nahavand, about 65 km south of Ecbatana.

[13] As John Hill mentioned, the reconstructed pronunciation of Yuluo in the Han period (*ka-ra*) also provides an excellent transcription of the Greek Χάραξ— Charax or Karax— meaning a "palisade", or a "fort" (Hill 2015: 257-258).

its capital, which, however, had been annexed by Romans in 64 B.C.; if it was a city, could it have been Syrian Antioch, or Charax at the Persian Gulf? Or does it stand for Susiana and the areas in the province of Fars to the east of the Persian Gulf? Of course, the hypothesis that Tiaozhi should be located on the Persian Gulf is not unreasonable because the Persian Gulf could be considered the western boundary of Anxi. If one set off from the Persian Gulf by ship, turned around the Arabian Peninsula, passed through the Red Sea, and landed in Egypt, one could reach Daqin (Yang 2014-2015: 135-136).[14] Recently, some scholars have argued that Tiaozhi could be identified with Characene and Susiana (Hill 2015: 227; Kauz/Liu Yingsheng 2008: 61). In that case, this large sea could be the Persian Gulf, which was also near Tiaozhi. Another passage in *Houhanshu* could support these identifications. In the text, when the author wants to describe a land route from Parthia to the Roman Empire, we read: *It is again said, departing from Anxi by the land route, circling around the sea and towards Haixi, you reach Daqin. The place is densely populated; there is a rest inn every 10 li, and a post station every 30 li. There is no trouble with bandits and robbers throughout the journey, but on the road are ferocious tigers and lions that are obstacles and bring harm to travellers. Any caravan that does not have over a hundred people carrying arms could be devoured by the animals* (Fan Ye 1971: 2918-2919).

If we identify Anxi in this case with one of its capitals, i.e. Ctesiphon, the sea with the Persian Gulf,[15] we may infer that the text is describing the land of Tiaozhi (Characene and Susiana). It seems that there were stations in Tiaozhi, which remind us of Parthian stations along the main route described by Isidorus of Charax. The description of lions and tigers[16] in Tiaozhi also correlates with the fauna that existed in southwestern Iran until recent times. Lions, though now extinct in the region, were still being hunted in the Khuzestan and Fars provinces around the mid-twentieth century (Khalaf-von Jaffa/Ali Taher 2006: 1-2, 12). Nevertheless, the de-

---

[14] For more details about the location of Tiaozhi, see Yang 2014-2015: 135-136.

[15] Hill (2015: 263) believes that Haixi refers to Egypt. However, it also can be identified with the Persian Gulf (Wang 2007: 98).

[16] The Persian lion is similar to a tiger in the length of the body and tail, but differs in the fur colour, which is tawny overall without the appearance of dark vertical stripes (Khalaf-von Jaffa/ Ali Taher 2006: 1-2).

scription in *Houhanshu* of a land route from Parthia to the Roman Empire, and its stations in Tiaozhi, could also refer to a trade route from Ctesiphon to Charax; this was also a road for travellers going between the Roman Empire and the Persian Gulf (Hill 2015: 258).

The text states: "Leaving Sibin and travelling south you cross a river (or by a river), then going southwest, you reach the Kingdom of Yuluo after 960 li." (Fan Ye 1971: 2918), and thus it seems that Gan Ying crossed the Tigris or came by the Tigris to reach Spasinou Charax. According to Pliny, Charax was located near the confluence of the Eulaeus river canal and the Tigris River (Pliny 1961, VI., Xxxi: 138-140). The Tigris, particularly its east bank, has long formed a natural corridor for north-south traffic. The Achaemenid Royal Road followed the east bank of the Tigris from central Babylonia until it reached Susa (Kiepert 1857: 134-40). Thus, one possibility is that Gan Ying used the same section of the Royal Road and followed the Tigris, and then before reaching Susa, he turned southwest until he reached Charax. Moreover, if we substitute stadia for li here, we get a very reasonable figure (about 178 km) for the distance from Susa to Charax.[17]
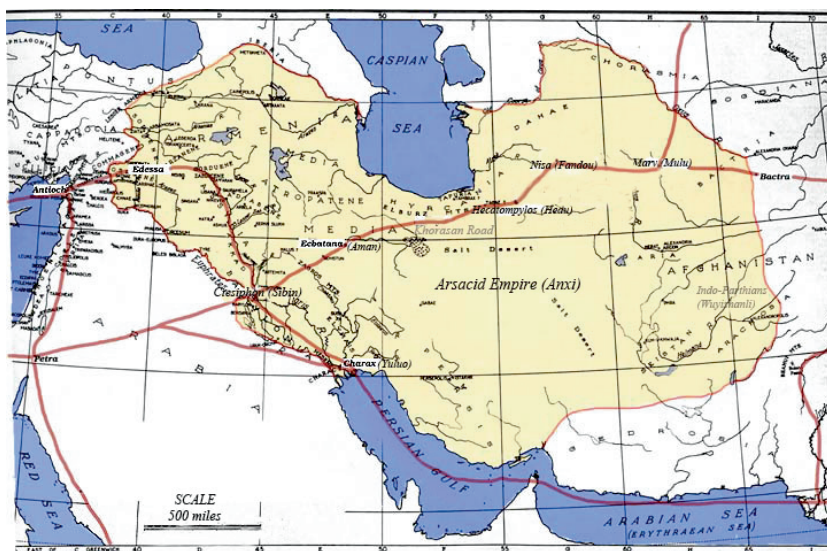
CONCLUSION

When trade along the Silk Road became more prosperous, the Arsacids tried to control it and they became the central intermediaries between China and the Rome. Chinese records also confirm that the Arsacids tried to maintain control over the Silk Road trade. For example, when the Chinese envoy Gan Ying wanted to reach Daqin, he was stopped by Arsacid sailors. This story implies that the Arsacids feared any contact between China and Rome that might weaken their profitable role as middlemen.

---

[17] Furthermore, we know that the Tigris has traditionally been navigable as far north as Ctesiphon (Potts 2006). Arrian states that the Achaemenids constructed weirs across the Tigris in order to prevent "any enemy having a superior naval force from sailing up from the sea into their country" (Anabasis 7.6.6-7), Thus, it is possible to imagine that Gan Ying also sailed to Spasinou Charax via the Tigris. There is also another possibility. Since the Parthian Ctesiphon has been tentatively located on the east bank of the Tigris, opposite Seleucia (Kröger 1993: 446-447), it is probable that Gan Ying first went southwest to cross the Tigris (or travel by the Tigris), then turned south to reach the Kingdom of Yuluo after 960 li. This means that there could be a textual error in *Houhanshu*. Gan Ying could have reported that: "Leaving Sibin and travelling southwest you cross a river, then going south, you reach the Kingdom of Yuluo after 960 li".

The importance of trade relations between West and East also prompted the Arsacids to establish more cities and strongholds along the main routes in their empire.

As discussed above, the Great Khorasan Road still functioned as the primary section of the Silk Road in the Arsacid period. There are several reasons behind this. First, the descriptions of Arsacid cities in Isodorus of Charax's *Parthian Stations* clearly show that during the time of the Arsacids, the location of the Empire's main trade route was similar to that of the Great Khorasan Road. Second, we showed that the cities of Mulu, Fandou, Hedu, Aman, and Sibin were also located along the Great Khorasan Road, also called the Parthian Royal Road, in the Arsacid Period. Finally, we reasoned that Gan Ying, after leaving Sibin (Ctesiphon), travelled along the Tigris or by the Tigris until he reached Yuluo. This implies that Chinese envoys and travellers, such as Gan Ying, used the Great Khorasan Road to pass through Arsacid Land. Thus, the main section of the Silk Road in the Arsacid Empire started from Merv (Mulu) and Nisa (Fandou), then passed through Hedu (Hecatompylos) and led across the Zagros Mountains to Aman (Ecbatana) and Sibin (Ctesiphon) (see Map 1).

Map. 1 Localisation of Arsacid cities according to the *Hanshu* and *Houhanshu*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ammianus, Marcellinus (1862), *Roman History*, Bohn, Book 23, London: 316-345.

Appian (1912-1913), *Roman History*, (transl.) H. White, London-Cambridge.

Arrian (1983), *Anabasis of Alexander*, (transl.) P. A. Brunt, (ed.) J. Henderson, Harvard.

Ban Gu 班固 (1959), *Hanshu* 汉书, Zhonghua shuju, j. 96a, Beijing: 3889-3890.

Chaumont, M. L. (1973), "Etudes d'histoire parthe. II. Capitales et résidences des premiers Arsacides (IIIe-Ier s. av. J.-C.)", *Syria* 50: 197-222.

Cook, J. M. (1983), *The Persian Empire*, London.

Daffinà, P. (1982), "The Han Shu Hsi Yü Chuan Re-translated. A Review Article", *T'oung pao*, vol. 68: 309-339.

Dandamayev, M./I. Medvedskaya (2006), "Media", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/media).

Fan Ye 范晔 (1971), *Houhanshu* 后汉书, Zhonghua shuju, j. 88, Beijing: 2918-19.

Fröhlich, Ch. (2004), "Indo-Parthian-Dynasty", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. XIII, fasc. 1: 100-103.

Frye, R. N. (1963), *The Heritage of Persia,* New York.

Garthwaite, G. R. (2005), *The Persians*, Oxford-Carlton.

Gregoratti, L. (2011), "A Parthian Port on the Persian Gulf: Characene and its Trade", *Anabasis: Studia Classica et Orientalia*, vol. 2: 209-229.

Hallock, R. T. (1969), *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, Chicago.

Hill, J. E. (2004), *The Peoples of the West from the Weilüe* (魏略) *by Yu Huan* (魚豢)*: A Third Century Chinese Account Composed between 239 and 265 CE. Draft Annotated English translation* (https://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/hhshu/hou_han_shu.html).

——(2015), *Through the Jade Gate to Rome: A Study of the Silk Routes during the Later Han Dynasty 1st to 2nd Centuries CE: An Annotated Translation of the Chronicle on the 'Western Regions' Updated and Expanded*, 2 volumes, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform.

Hirth, F. (1885), *China and the Roman Orient: Researches into their Ancient and Medieval Relations as Represented in Old Chinese Records*, Shanghai-Hong Kong.

Hulsewé, A. F. P/M. Loewe (1979), *China in Central Asia: The Early Stage 125 BC–AD 23: An Annotated Translation of Chapters 61 and 96 of the History of the Former Han Dynasty*, Sinica Leidensia, vol. XIV, Leiden.

Kauz, R./Liu, Yingsheng (2008), "Armenia in Chinese Sources", *Iran and the Caucasus*, vol. 12/2: 57-72.

Khalaf-von Jaffa/Norman Ali Bassam Ali Taher (2006), "The Asiatic or Persian Lion (Panthera leo persica, Meyer 1826) in Palestine and the Arabian and Islamic Region", *Gazelle: The Palestinian Biological Bulletin* 58, Sharjah: 1-13.

Khan, F. A. (1972), "Ancient Routes between the Indus Valley and Iran", *The Memorial Volume of the Vth International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology I*, Tehran: 120-27.

Kiepert, H. (1857), "Die persische Königsstrasse durch Vorderasien nach Herodotos", *Monatsbericht der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 16: 123-40.

Kröger, J. (1993), "Ctesiphon", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. vi, fasc. 4: 446-448.

Leslie, D. D/K. H. J. Gardiner (1996), *The Roman Empire in Chinese Sources*, Volume XV. Università diRoma, Pubblicati dal Dipartimento di Studi Orientali.

Le Strange, G. (1905), *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate: Mesopotamia, Persia, and Central Asia, from the Moslem Conquest to the Time of Timur*, New York.

Majidzadeh, Y. (1982), "Lapis lazuli and the Great Khorasan Road", *Paléorient*, vol. 8/1: 59-69.

Olbrycht, M. J. (2015), "Parthian Cities and Strongholds in Turkmenistan", *International Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 2: 117–125.

Pelliot, P. (1959), *Notes on Marco Polo*, vol. I, Paris.

Pliny (1961), *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder (77 CE), (trans.) W. H. S. Jones, London-Cambridge.

Potts, D. T. (2006), "Tigris River", *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/tigris-river).

Pourshariati, P. (2008), *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, London.

Pulleyblank, E. G. (1989), "An-hsi", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. I, fasc. 9: 999-1000.

Schippmann, K. (1986), "Archeology-iii. Seleucid and Parthian", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. II, fasc. 3: 297-301.

Schmitt, R. (2007), "Isidorus of Charax", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. XIV, fasc. 2: 125-127.

Schoff, W. H. (1914), *Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax. An Account of the Overland Trade Route between the Levant and India in the First Century B.C.: The Greek text, with a translation and commentary*, Philadelphia.

Shahbazi, A. Sh. (1990), "Capital Cities I. Pre-Islamic Times", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 4: 768-770.

Sima, Qian 司马迁 (1959), *Shiji* 史记, Zhonghua shuju, j. 123, Beijing.

Wang, Tao (2007), "Parthia in China: A Re-examination of the Historical Records", *The Age of the Parthians: The Idea of Iran*, vol. II, London: 87-104.

Yāqut (1955-57), *Buldān*, II, Beirut.

Yang, J. (2013), "Hellenistic World and the Silk Road", *Anabasis: Studia Classica et Orientalia* 4: 73-91.

——(2014), "Hellenistic Information in China", *CHS Research Bulletin* 2/2 (http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn3:hlnc.essay:YangJ.Hellenistic_Information_in_China.2014).

——(2014-2015), "Some Clues of the Hellenistic World and the Roman East Hidden in China's Early Four Historical books", *Talanta*, Xlvi-Xlvii: 121-143.

Yu, Taishan (2013), "China and the Ancient Mediterranean World: A Survey of Ancient Chinese Sources", *Sino-Platonic Papers*, No 173, University of Pennsylvania.